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Lucia A Keegan 07/25/2006 09:43:52 AM From DB/Inbox: Lucia A Keegan

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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION REPORT -
Israeli-Lebanese Conflict: Lebanese Conflict - Iran
Iraq
PARIS - Monday, July 24, 2006

(A) SUBJECTS COVERED IN TODAY'S REPORT:

Lebanese Conflict
Iran
Iraq

(B) SUMMARY OF COVERAGE:

Dominating themes in headlines and editorials today revolve around the U.S. becoming more involved diplomatically in the Lebanese conflict with the visit to the region of Secretary of State Rice. The French national press, however, see the U.S. position "on the fence" between its Arab allies, Israel and Europe. American diplomatic efforts are viewed as hindered by the fact that the U.S. has no contact with Hezbollah. The editorial in right-of-center Le Figaro sees Syria as one of the keys to containing Hezbollah but

"the question is, what will Damascus ask for in return?" Finally the issue of sending peace keeping troops to Lebanon is widely commented, left-of-center Liberation suggests that France would necessarily be heavily involved and weekly newspaper Le Journal du Dimanche notes that "this time the U.S. will not be able to go it alone."

Right-of-center Le Figaro's front page carries a photo of Secretary of State Rice and announces that: "America is becoming involved in the Middle East crisis." The inside article with a large photo of President Bush and Secretary Rice meeting with the Saudi Foreign Minister says: "The Americans run the risk of isolating themselves by refusing to join in the international chorus for an immediate cease-fire. Today they no longer have a great deal of time to grant Israel... An international meeting of the contact group will be held in Rome as of Wednesday... The Bush Administration should have no trouble in finding consensus on the issues of humanitarian aid, reconstruction and the reinforcement of the Lebanese government, however the question of stabilization troops in the region could be more controversial... In the meantime a de-escalation of violence will depend on the U.S.'s willingness to influence Israel."

On privately-owned TF1's evening newscast a journalist noted, "there are two diplomacies working in parallel right now: French and American."

Left-of-center Le Monde asks: "how can American diplomacy have any hope for success since it has no contact with Hezbollah...? American diplomacy is in a difficult situation caught as it is between pressure from allied Arab countries like Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia as well as Europe for an immediate stop to hostilities and the desire not to undermine the Lebanese government and Jerusalem's desire to stop Hezbollah."

In an editorial in right-of-center Le Figaro entitled "The U.S. and the Syrian Factor" Stephane Marchand writes: "The U.S. knows that in order to reach the desired goal in the Middle East, it will have to include Syria in the equation..." (See Part C)

Popular right-of-center Le Parisien carries an interview with Lebanese Druze leader Walid Joumblatt about Hezbollah's position in Lebanon. While Joumblatt calls for an immediate cease-fire, he blames neither the Israeli nor the Lebanese governments for the conflict. For Joumblatt, Syria and Iran are the true culprits as they attempt to deflect international attention away from themselves. "Hezbollah has taken Lebanon hostage. It receives its orders from Damascus."

A poll in weekly Le Journal du Dimanche sees 39 percent of the respondents in France saying that Hezbollah is responsible for the crisis in the Middle East, while 30 percent fault Israel. Some 48 percent trust the UN to resolve the conflict over 25 percent for the EU, 15 percent for France and 9 percent for the U.S.

Left-of-center Liberation reports that "France is defending the idea a peace keeping mission" in Lebanon, but the question is if "Europe in general, and France in particular, is strong enough to send troops into Lebanon while Hezbollah has not been sufficiently weakened...?"

The Monday edition of left-of-center Le Monde reports that President Chirac received a letter from the Iranian president. "The letter that Mr. Chirac received is very different in tone from the one received by George W. Bush in May... But the fact that it was received the day before the new Iranian ambassador to France presented his credentials to President Chirac is interesting... According to sources close to President Chirac the letter seeks to further divide the West on the issue of sanctions... And to serve as a reminder that while the Israeli army and Hezbollah continue to fight, Iran's influence in the region is non-negligible." (See Part C)

Catholic La Croix reports on Palestinian public opinion in Gaza, which it says increasingly crystallizes against Israel each day while the military operations continue. Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah has the moral support of Palestinians and, according to some, "is more popular than Saddam Hussein during the Gulf War." One Palestinian likened the Israeli military operation in Gaza and

Lebanon to "the rules of Bin Laden, not the Geneva conventions."

Left-of-center Liberation mentions the new Human Rights Watch report that says that "prisoners held by American troops in Iraq continue to be systematically tortured with the approval of the military superiors." Liberation calls this new report "damning." (See Part C)

(C) SUPPORTING TEXT/BLOCK QUOTES:

"Experience"

Jacques Esperandieu in weekly Sunday newspaper Le Journal du Dimanche (07/23): "The presence in Beirut of the French Prime Minister on the sixth day of fighting was an extremely symbolic gesture, as is the current visit of the Foreign Minister in several countries in the region. One cannot help but see these trips as an attempt to 'one up' the U.S. and its Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. But perhaps this time there is a slight chance for success. American credibility in the region suffers from the intervention in Iraq and the country's unconditional support for Israel. Nothing can be accomplished without the Americans, but this time they will not be able to go it alone."

"Slim Margin for Maneuver"

Dominique Vales in regional La Montagne (07/24): "Even if French diplomacy's margin for maneuver in the Middle East has been very limited over the course of the last decades, its positions and proposals are not ignored. If nothing else, because France continues to have some degree of influence on certain countries that traditionally have a determining role in the region. Starting of course with the U.S. whose involvement in the current crisis has reached a new level with the initiatives proposed by Secretary Rice who is apparently much more aware of the explosive nature of the situation than President Bush."

"Rules"

The editorial by Gerard Dupuy in left-of-center Liberation asks (07/24): "Does a stabilization force in Lebanon need to come under the banner of NATO like in Afghanistan? Wouldn't this de-territorialize the 'Atlantic' Alliance and draw it into a long-lasting conflict about which its members are far from having reached a consensus contrary to Afghanistan... The hint of a diplomatic solution does not mean a speedy end to the fighting... But maybe Condoleezza Rice's visit to the region will make things move forward. Maybe not. What is certain is that the coming days will see the list of victims and evacuees grow."

"Saying the Opposite"

Antoine de Gaudemar's editorial in the Saturday Sunday edition of left-of-center Liberation (07/22-23): "Ten days after the beginning of the conflict, American diplomacy is starting to wake up. While continuing to support its Israeli ally... the Bush Administration has had to come to the realization that Tsahal's strikes have not significantly weakened Hezbollah... The U.S. is starting to come around to the idea of stabilization troops but the American Secretary of State is saying the opposite of Europe when she

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qualifies as illusory the idea of an immediate cease-fire... In fact, the conflicting view between Europe and the U.S. on a solution to the crisis in Lebanon is due to two divergent visions of the Middle East... this divergence was already put to the test in Iraq."

"The U.S. and the Syrian Factor"

Stephane Marchand comments in right-of-center Le Figaro (07/24): The U.S. does not want to rush Ehoud Olmert... therefore Condoleezza Rice's trip to the region will not seek to convince the parties to return to a pre-existing situation... but to a more durable solution thanks to the implementation of Resolution 1559... But the head of American diplomacy will have to factor Syria into the equation... without Syria it will be impossible to marginalize Hezbollah. Syria is the movement's logistical tutor... If Syria agreed to contain Hezbollah it would by the same token weaken Iran... But to be able to kill these two birds with one stone Damascus will no doubt ask for a considerable political gesture in return for the favor, such as the total normalization of U.S.-Syrian relations."

Iran

"Iranian Calculations"

The unsigned editorial in the Saturday edition of left-of-center Le Monde mockingly notes that the "coincidence is astounding. Nine days after the beginning of the war in Lebanon... Teheran chose to make a statement concerning its nuclear program... The latest statement is a setback for the West that along with Russia and China, have been trying to get the Iranian leadership to put an immediate stop to uranium enrichment... The war in Lebanon began right when the various parties were at their wits end with regard to Teheran... There is no tangible evidence to establish a cause and effect but what is certain is that Iran has a feeling of impunity and power and intends to capitalize on the conflict in the Middle East."

Iraq

"Iraqis are Skeptical Concerning National Reconciliation"

Delphine Minoui writes in right-of-center Le Figaro (07/24): "The Iraqi people are growing extremely weary of the American presence in their country. The recent scandal of an American soldier accused of raping and Iraqi girl and the massacre of civilians in Haditha contribute to the resentment already strong after the episodes of torture at Abu Ghraib... Today, there are many accusatory fingers pointing at the huge crane on the left bank of the Tigres that is being used to build the new American embassy: the only sign of reconstruction project in Baghdad that is crumbling under the current violence. The precariousness of the infrastructure, the lack of fuel and electricity (about one out of every six hours) add to the long list of disillusionment." STAPLETON